

E'vaan Duncan: 2018 Research Award Entry Essay

I was assigned *Dreaming in Cuban* mid-semester, the high point of academic stress in just about every student's college career. A student on edge means there is little time for emotional interference, yet somehow, rushing over the beginning chapters of *Dreaming in Cuban*, I found myself unblinking and entranced by the words on the page. Only so many forms of art are able to break through to me due to hyperactivity, but Garcia pulled me right in, and after an hour, I realized I had finished half the novel in one sitting. I found one character the most intriguing, who is also the only character in the book in which all of their sections are written in first-person. I enjoy Pilar because of her interests, and I understand her desire to return to her native roots. She is the only character raised in the United States, like me. This relation made me ask myself why is it that the character who is from the same region as me became my favorite but also, from an American point-of-view, the most reliable. More importantly, Pilar is the motivation behind my choice of topic for the paper because her American background is the main difference between her and the rest of her family members. This difference is the common ingredient among all of the other characteristics and antics about Pilar. I began to wonder at this point, could region influence the human mind so much that its mental capacity is completely altered by its environment? The way the mind copes and rebels? The answer sounds obvious, but when I really think about it, this question makes the mind seem much more fragile and bendable than it already is. I had no prior experience researching so intensively for a paper as difficult as this one. I learned the hard way that good research is what drives a well-written paper. At first, I could not word my thesis correctly because my sources were leading me into the wrong direction. I would end up vaguely rambling in my drafts with no hard evidence to back me up. Although I knew I was writing about mental health, this is such a broad, widespread topic, and it was easy to lost sight of what was grounding me in the story in the first place. I was researching backwards, broad to specific, when I should have been researching the most specific cultural effects to get that wider range of information. I finally realized why my papers come out so vague so often. After some emails and help from my professor/advisor, I was able to find sources that supported my argument, rather than distracted from it. I utilized the library, the MLA database, and a rewording of my phrase searching.